ELLA MORTON; OR, THE MAIDEN'S FIRST SORROW.

BY VILLA C——.

"LEAVE me, Fannie, leave me for a while; I would fain be alone at this hour," and, as the door closed after the footsteps of her gentle friend, Ella turned towards the window, and her pale face betrayed that her soul was struggling with an emotion almost too deep for utterance. The evening was beautiful, but she seemed unconscious of it; the purling of a little rivulet fell gently on the ear, but she listened not to the soothing sound; and, although her eyes were turned upward, she seemed not to note the myriads of stars that came forth from their distant homes to look down on the dwellers of earth. Her eyes were dimmed with tears, and ere long words of agony burst from her lips. "Oh! mother, come from your heavenly home, or take me thither with you; earth has no charms for your child since you have gone. Alone I must struggle on through life against words of envy, and looks of unkindness, perchance of scorn; few will think of the orphan girl kindly, many may seek to scatter thorns in my path; and when my spirit is weary and sad, there will be no mother's bosom on which to rest my drooping head, no mother's voice to speak words of consolation and balm to my wounded soul, and no mother's heart to pour forth its deepest, its best, its unfailing love. Oh! be my guardian spirit, hover around my every path, guide me in the way your steps trod heavenward; in sickness, in sorrow, still watch over your suffering, stricken child; and, if it may be thus granted, be my attendant to your own bright home. Father in Heaven, take me, oh! take me early, and let the flowers of spring bloom above my grave!" She threw herself on the couch, and abandoned herself to uncontrolled emotion.

"Ella, dear Ella, will you not rouse yourself, and cease thus madly, wickedly to repine against the will of your Creator?" murmured a soft voice in her ear.

For a moment she raised her face, on which was written anguish too deep for utterance; but again she buried it in the cushions with only a moan of intense agony.

"Ella, your bereavement is indeed most severe, and I need not assure you of my deepest sympathy; but remember, my friend, that except ——"

"Oh! Fannie, Fannie, *you* have never lost a mother," interrupted Ella, vehemently, "and you *do* not, you *cannot* know the utter loneliness that pervades my spirit. For years has my existence been bound up in hers, for years have I watched her every look, and listened intently to the lowest tones of her voice. I have seen her fading away, becoming too lovely for earth, and now, now she is gone. There are none to love me now, none to care for me more; and oh! I would that I were resting beside her!"

"Are there none to care for you?" was the reproachful reply.

"Yes, *you* will not forsake me, my own kind Fannie; and may you be richly rewarded for all your kindness, your unwearied affection! and Heaven grant that you may long, long be spared the desolation, the woe of this hour!"

"Holy Father, bless her!" were the murmured words as Fannie gently glided from the room.

It was but too true—Ella Morton was indeed an orphan, and an orphan with no near ties to bind her to earth. Her father had died when her infantile lips could but just lisp his name, and her memory retained no traces of the form she had so earnestly yearned to see. In the prime of his days he had departed, far from home and kindred; stranger hands closed his eyes, strangers had consigned him to his last resting-place, and the beings he loved so dearly were denied the sad consolation of weeping over his tomb.

Alfred Morton had had but one sister, and to her he had clung from his earliest infancy. A gentle, lovely being was she, one of those who seem created to diffuse light and joy wherever they tread, and to scatter sunshine over the darkest, gloomiest days. Five years his senior, she had rejoiced when her baby brother was placed on her knee, and she laughed gleefully when she could call up the smile on his beaming face, or hear the merry shout of his infant voice. Her hand had guided his first tottering steps, and on him she bestowed more than a sister's love. Years passed away, and as the laughing babe changed into a thoughtless boy, he knew that her eyes were ever bent on him, and that in her ear he might pour forth his childish sorrows and meet with a ready sympathy. In every sport she was his chosen companion, if she were near; he sought for no greater happiness. An epidemic that swept the land, carrying millions to their graves, cast its darkening shadow over the home of the Mortons, and, in a few brief hours, father and mother were laid in the same tomb, while Helen and Alfred stood by that tomb, sorrowing orphans. The little boy was too young to understand his bereavement; he only knew that the parents he had loved were gone, and he turned with a still deeper affection to his sister. It was then that the true worth of her character shone forth; and, though but a child in years, she became, from that day, a woman in spirit. For her brother she lived; she taught him to look to the skies, and, in tones of sol-

ness, bade him remember that his mother was there, and that there too he should go if he loved his Saviour here.

Boyhood expanded into youth, youth into early manhood, and still that sister was ever by his side. Was he sad?—*her* smile would cheer him; was he discouraged?—*her* voice would whisper hope; was he wayward and erring?—*her* reproving countenance, *her* beseeching words would gently win him back to truth and rectitude. He entered the world with a firm purpose and a steady eye; manfully he struggled, and gloriously he won. His own patrimony would have richly maintained him, but he burned to distinguish himself, and to have his name shine brightly in the annals of his country. One object was ever before him—it was his sister's mild face; and, that she might have reason to glory in her brother, he made every exertion, and crowned each with success. At twenty-four, no more brilliant talents were to be found than those possessed by Alfred Morton. His eloquence held thousands spell-bound, and fame even then placed her brightest laurels on his brow

A few months passed away, and he pressed his sister closely to his heart in a parting embrace. She whose existence was almost identified with his own was about to leave him; she, who had been his constant companion, his friend, his counselor, whose affection had been the sunshine of his life, was on the eve of departure for other lands. A few weeks before, she had been united to one whose self-sacrificing, devoted spirit was equal to her own, and together they were going to tell of a Saviour's love on Turkey's soil; to labor, perhaps suffer, for the truth; to supplant the Crescent, and place in its stead the "Cross of the Crucified."

"Sister," were his last words, "sister, farewell; but for you I might have been the veriest wretch on earth; what I owe you I can never repay; *your* reward is laid up in heaven. You go on a high and holy mission—may angels guard your steps whithersoever they turn, and your Father in whom you trust keep you from all ill! Your absence will leave a void in my heart that none else can fill; but I would not detain you even for a moment. Heaven bless you, my beloved sister! Farewell."

With an aching heart Alfred Morton watched the vessel that bore Helen and her husband far away, and then returned to his *residence*, for *home* it no longer seemed—feeling as if there was now no object for which to live. But he told his sister, truly, he would not have detained her, for he knew that hers was a nobler course, and hers a higher destiny than his own.

Months passed on, and those that saw him in the crowded throng, or listened to his soul-stirring words, would not have imagined that there was sorrow in his heart. He was courted and admired; everywhere the distinguished orator was received with applause; and many there were who could have cherished a deeper feeling than mere admiration for him whose fame had spread far and wide. But, one vision of feminine loveliness had been his, which he deemed could never be replaced, and he *could* not, he *dare* not bind himself by ties which might be repugnant to himself, and cause him flagrantly to violate the laws of his Maker.

Come with me, you that like to see strange things, to yonder chapel, and pause for a moment. Rumor with her busy tongue has been flying from house to house, and though the hour is early, many are assembled to witness what would seem to be an unlooked-for event. Look around you, and what fixes your attention? A bridal train is passing up the aisle, and look closely, for, methinks that form, that bearing, is one that you should know. They stand beside the altar, and now the vows of Alfred Morton and Margaret Stanley are plighted, and they turn to leave the church. Watch carefully now for a glimpse of the bride, for the chosen of him so widely renowned should be one with whom few could compete. Are you disappointed? Gaze once more, then; I know that beauty of form and feature is not hers, I know that the complexion is not one of fairest hue, nor are those eyes dazzling in their brilliance; but there is a beauty there that shall endure when these have passed away. There is intellect on that brow, there is soul in that eye, and there is an expression resting on that face that arrogant beauties might vainly strive to possess. Enclosed in that form is a gentle, a "meek and quiet" spirit, and within that bosom beats a heart that will not grow cold when the storms of life dash harshly and pitilessly on the objects of its present regard.

Margaret Stanley was not beautiful; to some, a mere acquaintance would not discover her noble soul; but there was that within her that fitted her to be the life companion of Alfred Morton. She realized the dream that he had formed, and though some envious ones scornfully passed her by, those that were honored with the friendship of Mrs. Morton wondered no more at her husband's choice. She was the light of his home; and as, in the days of his boyhood, he ever found his sister's ear open to his joys or sorrows, so now, in his maturer years, he turned his footsteps towards his own hearth, and if weary and desponding, ever found an influence that would brighten everything. His home was a blessed place, and within its hallowed precincts the busy world was forgotten.

Two years passed away, and they were no longer alone by their fireside, for an infant's cheerful voice called forth answering music in their hearts, and drew them more closely to earth. On Helen, or Ella as they always called her, every care was lavished; for her no sacrifice was too great; and her gleesome spirit would be infused into their own. Daily they watched her with ever-increasing delight, and as they saw her merry gambols, or listened to her infant prattle, they almost forgot that any cloud could overshadow the horizon of their lives. Three years more passed away, and still the full sunshine of joy lit their home and gladdened their hearts. But joy may not last forever; for a time it

is given to us, to make us turn with a truer love and a holier trust towards our heavenly home; but, when earthly objects cause us to lose sight of that home, the barriers we have raised must be broken down, and our souls be purified, though it be through suffering.

It was with a burdened heart and a saddened eye that Mr. Morton read to his wife a letter that had just reached him, bearing the mournful intelligence of his cherished sister's rapid decline, and that he communicated to her his design of instantly going to her, although it might be but to see her die. "You never saw my sister," were his words; "but you know her lovely character, you know her unwearied care for me, and if I *could*, *ought* I to leave her to die in a distant land almost alone? Should not duty, as well as love, prompt me to go to her? and if her spirit must be severed from earth, should not I be there to catch the last glance of her eyes, that never were bent on me but with the tenderest devotion? To part from you, my wife, and my precious child, will be a struggle severe indeed; but Heaven will watch over you, and, if it be our Father's will, we shall be rejoined yet again on earth; if it be not so, we will still look to Him with unwavering trust, for we know that 'he will do all things well.'"

No word was spoken in opposition, and in two days Alfred Morton was on the bosom of the ocean, hastening to the bedside of his dying sister.

Six months had fled since Alfred Morton left his home in the full pride of manhood; and by the hearth of that once cheerful spot, sat his desolate widow, and his fatherless child. Little Ella could not understand why her "papa would come back no more," nor why her dear mamma looked so sad, and sighed so deeply when she pressed her darling to her bosom. And her mother, as she watched her innocent child, murmured a prayer that for *her* sake she might still live. But for her, she would gladly have laid her head low in the grave; but when her child would gently climb on her knee, pass its little hands over her pale face, and look sad to see her so mournful, she reproached herself for thus yielding to her regrets, and devoted herself more unwearyingly to her beloved little one. Time tarried not; and as day after day Ella grew more lovely, more beautiful, as her intellect expanded, and her mind showed more of its strength and power, so the shadow gradually departed from the mother's brow, and a peace which is not of this world shed its light over her countenance. To Ella, her mother was all in all. Had sickness paled her cheek? Ella's station was by her bedside, Ella's hand administered medicine and nourishment, Ella's voice gently lulled her to repose, and Ella's was the first eye to brighten when health returned.

One being alone beside her mother obtained any share of Ella's affection. Fannie Enfield was the daughter of one of Mrs. Morton's early friends, and the two girls were too much thrown together not to become mutually attached. A sister had never been given to Fannie, and she welcomed Ella with all a sister's affection. Through their childhood they had been chosen companions, and as years flew by, their early friendship became still more firmly cemented.

But Ella's eye grew troubled, and her face wore an anxious expression, for her mother's loved form grew thin, and her face was very pale, save where the fever flush dwelt brightly in her cheek; her eye assumed a lustre too brilliant to last, and medical skill proved unavailing. With the agony that only those know who have lost all they loved save one, and who see the frail cords that held that one back to life about to be severed, Ella watched her mother's fading form, hoping that the dawn of each day would bring health and vigor to her whose existence was well nigh ended. Wildly, madly she prayed that yet a little while might be added to her life; but it was only the wild cry of despair. No faith, no love mingled with that petition, and when with each new hour hope grew fainter, no resignation marked her sorrow, no response of "Thy will be done!" arose from her heart.

Mrs. Morton saw this but too clearly, and earnestly she sought to lead Ella to look for guidance and consolation from Him whose ear is ever open to the cry of the sorrowing. Gently she chid her for thus yielding to her grief, and bade her meet her in the bright spirit-land, to whose worshipers *she* should soon be joined. Her last words were to her dearly beloved daughter, her last look was fixed on her, and as a smile of angelic sweetness rested on her face, and a prayer trembled on her lips, her spirit fled to add another to the choral band that encircles the throne of the Eternal.

For hours Ella Morton sat by the bedside of her departed mother, searching for one indication that life still remained; but vainly she lingered, for the living principle that had existed in that marble form had passed away, no more to reanimate it, until "earth and sea give up their dead."

There is a limit to physical and mental endurance, and when Fannie Enfield entered the room, Ella had fallen insensible by her mother's side. With more than a sister's tenderness, Fannie watched over her friend, and when animation returned to that apparently lifeless body, it was Fannie's glad eye that beamed hopefully on the sufferer. For a single moment Ella seemed unconscious of all she had suffered, but the full tide of agony quickly rushed over her, and despairingly she prayed to die. It was well for Ella that she had such a friend; it was well that there was a Fannie to speak words of hope, and breathe of purer skies than those that overcanopy our world; else she might have turned away from the call of the heavenly messenger, and the chastisement that was sent in mercy might have steeled her heart and weighed her down to death.

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A year has passed since the night we first saw Ella, on the evening of her mother's funeral, and in the same room a youthful form is bending in prayer, and a holy radiance overspreads that fair young face.

It is Ella; but how changed! Yes, she had sought for happiness where none ever sought and were refused. Sorrow has accomplished its sacred mission, and though a more subdued expression rests on her face than is common to those who have lost none of the objects on which their affections have been placed, though her thoughts turn less to the things of this world, and are fixed more constantly on those that shall not pass away, yet she is none the less loved by those who cluster around her, and listen unwearyingly to every accent of her voice.

To shed joy around her is her unceasing aim; to make more easy the path of those who but for her might live uncared for, and die unheeded; to pour balm into the bleeding hearts of those from whom the busy world turn carelessly away, these are the purposes for which she exists. Prayers and blessings follow her from many mouths, and in her own heart there is diffused a happiness and peace which those who bow before the shrine of Mammon would vainly seek.

Has my tale been a sad one, gentle reader?—Remember that there are dark pages as well as those that are light in life's history; and, if you have never known in your own case the sorrow that the loss of one you devotedly loved has occasioned; if a mother's eye is resting fondly on you as you peruse these pages, and no vacant chair stands by your hearth, pour forth your richest thanks that thus it is. But if a dark cloud should overspread your dwelling, and your heart be desolate and sad because the Angel of Death has come thither, then raise your thoughts above the things that are within the power of the Destroyer, bow meekly to the will of your God, and you shall then know that to the darkest and most cheerless night may succeed a bright and glorious morning, and you shall feel

"——that by the lights and shades through which your pathway lies,
By the beauty and the grief alike, you are training for the skies."

POETRY.

NEW YEAR.

BY ABBY ALLIN.

Up into the sunshine, soul of mine!
I brook no darkness here;
The sun is shining on the hills
In the first day of the year!
The glittering snow is on the pines,
Like frosted cones they rise,
And the earth below, and the sky above,
Are clad in happy guise!

Up, up, my soul! no longer sit,
With folded hands, alone;
The Future opes her arms to thee,
The Past is dead and gone!
The Future, with her luring voice,
Cries, "Hither, hither, sweet!"
The Past, a shadow of the lost,
Is tracking at my feet.

Up, up, my soul! nor glance behind;
Turn not one wistful look;
Leave all the Past to Him who gave,
To Him, again, who took!
Press on, press on, the year of life
Cannot be always May;
Yet the snow-birds sing on the leafless tree,
And why not thou as they?

Up, up, my soul! no longer sit
Inert with fear and dread,
Since Nature's calm is all around,
And the sky shines overhead!
Up, up, and climb the mountain path,
With strong, unfettered will!
And let thy motto ever be,
"Onward and upward" still!

TO A SNOW-BIRD

BY M. E. H.

Welcome, thou little warbler,
With tuneful notes and sweet!
Thrice welcome, in these dreary days
Of frost, and snow, and sleet!

Chirp on! thou bring'st sweet memories
Of the laughing summer-time,
Of whispering leaves, the warm south wind,
And the streamlet's silver chime!

Where hast thou been, bright wanderer,
Since the winter last was here?
Why cam'st thou not with the summer birds,
When the sky was blue and clear?

Spring brought her buds and blossoms,
And, in every grove and dell,
Those gentle minstrels tuned their notes,
Of happiness to tell.

They ushered in the morning,
They bade the day adieu;
When evening shadows gathered round,
Home to their nests they flew.

Oh, the world was then so beautiful!
The air with music rung!
Why cam'st thou not when its summer garb
Was brightly o'er it flung?

Alas! too soon it faded!
The flowers bent down to die!
And cold, dark clouds, with chilling looks,
Came o'er the autumn sky!

The leaves grew brown and withered,
And fell upon the ground,